



**NAVAL  
POSTGRADUATE  
SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**EFFECTIVENESS OF U.S. MILITARY FEMALE  
ENGAGEMENT TEAMS**

by

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September 2012

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**REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE**
*Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188*

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.

<b>1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)</b>	<b>2. REPORT DATE</b> September 2012	<b>3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED</b> Master's Thesis
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> Effectiveness of U.S. Military Female Engagement Teams		<b>5. FUNDING NUMBERS</b>
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Gail C. Long		
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000		<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>
<b>9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A		<b>10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>
<b>11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government. IRB Protocol number <u>N/A</u> .		
<b>12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited		<b>12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE</b>
<b>13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)</b>		
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**14. SUBJECT TERMS:** Afghanistan; COIN; Development; Gender; Civil-Military; Female; Women.

**15. NUMBER OF PAGES**  
67

**16. PRICE CODE**
**17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT**  
Unclassified

**18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE**  
Unclassified

**19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT**  
Unclassified

**20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT**  
UU

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**EFFECTIVENESS OF U.S. MILITARY FEMALE ENGAGEMENT TEAMS**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(STABILIZATION & RECONSTRUCTION)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
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## ABSTRACT

Female Engagement Teams (FET) are one of many efforts that have gained visibility since the U.S. entered Iraq and Afghanistan. As emphasis in these wars continues to be placed on counterinsurgency (COIN) and population-centric conflict, enabling programs/teams—namely, Female Engagement, Human Terrain (HTTs), Provincial Reconstruction (PRTs), District Support (DSTs)—have been constituted to target perceived gaps in access to the population, cultural and contextual frameworks, local level governance structures, and development needs. While the HTTs, PRTs and DSTs typically operate within a joint civil-military organizational structure, the FETs are distinguished by their purely military character, as well as their assignment of personnel with arguably little discernible background or training relevant to the job. The issue of training and methodology of FETs is especially important due to the sensitivity of their mission (i.e., working with women in a conservative and often dangerous environment) and the trajectory toward which it takes the military, into what has been a purely civilian domain. From a strategy perspective, the aims and results of the program are relevant to understanding how U.S. military leaders view the role of women in the success of COIN, as well as how inter-agency cooperation and civil-military relations are evolving.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ALN	Armée de Libération Nationale
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
CAG	Civil Affairs Group
CERP	Commander's Emergency Response Program
COIN	Counterinsurgency
COMISAF	Commander of the NATO International Security Assistance Force
DST	District Support Team
FET	Female Engagement Team
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale
FM	Field Manual
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
HTT	Human Terrain Team
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MEDCAP	Medical Civic Action Program
MEB	Marine Expeditionary Brigade
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government
USMC	United States Marine Corps
VMO	Village Medical Outreach

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

In spring 2009, the United States Marine Corps launched the Female Engagement Team (FET) program in Afghanistan with the aim of accessing local women—a segment of the society which had, due to strict cultural limitations on visibility of women, previously remained off limits for male military personnel and, as determined by several actors involved in Afghanistan military operations, needed to be included in the counter-insurgency effort.<sup>1</sup> Female Marines with various military occupational specialties (MOS) were identified, recruited from their commands, provided minimal orientation and training on culture and gender issues, and sent in theater.<sup>2</sup> While many of the initial challenges were addressed over the next year—enhanced training, relieving the double-hatting of the FET Marines, and providing increased continuity of FET Marines in the battle space—the actual impact and sustainability of FET efforts remained difficult to measure.<sup>3</sup> By 2010, NATO had also confirmed the importance of such programs. The May 2010 NATO/International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) *Engagement with Afghan Females Directive* states the importance of female engagements “to support the battle space owners’ priorities, including, but not limited to...understanding of the operating environment, civil-military operations, medical capabilities visits, and educational programs...in order to build confidence and support for the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and ISAF.”<sup>4</sup>

Development work of this sort is not typically a military (at least non-Civil Affairs) function; however, in non-permissive theaters of operation where there can exist

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Vedder, “Engaging the Female Populace,” *Headquarters International Security Assistance Force*, Classified (SECRET) version released February 23, 2010, Unclassified version released March 21, 2011, 7–8, <https://jko.harmonieweb.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> Paula Broadwell, “Women at War,” *New York Times*, October 21, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/21/opinion/21iht-edbroadwell.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Ann Jones, “Woman to Woman in Afghanistan,” *The Nation*, October 27, 2010, <http://www.thenation.com/article/155623/woman-woman-afghanistan>.

<sup>4</sup> NATO/ Headquarters International Security Assistance Force, “Engagement with Afghan Females Directive,” May 31, 2010, 1–2, [http://cryptome.org/dodi/100531\\_EngagementwAFFemales\\_ISAF-3.pdf](http://cryptome.org/dodi/100531_EngagementwAFFemales_ISAF-3.pdf).

a lack of civilian development actors, the Marines have veered into the civil dimension with the initiation of the FET program. As the program has made strides to better prepare its female Marines and demonstrate a more robust capability as a force multiplier, it would be useful to study it from a civil-military perspective in order to weigh its merits and determine whether or not it has a future in other theaters, after forces are drawn down in Afghanistan. Whatever the goal of FETs, whether gaining women's loyalty for purposes of COIN (per David Galula)<sup>5</sup> or gathering intelligence, if engagements are conducted without a deep cultural understanding or sensitivity to basic development principles then the program could have more adverse effects than beneficial ones—and this should be of concern for those in development circles. How has the FET program evolved since being established in Afghanistan and has it identified its core mission and goals as part of a comprehensive COIN strategy, and thereby achieved results for commanders on the ground?

## **B. IMPORTANCE**

The Female Engagement Team concept is one of many efforts that have gained visibility and popularity since the United States entered both Iraq and Afghanistan. As emphasis in these wars continues to be placed on counterinsurgency (COIN) and population-centric conflict, enabling programs in the form of ground-level teams—namely, Female Engagement, Human Terrain (HTTs), Provincial Reconstruction (PRTs), District Support (DSTs), etc.—have been constituted to target perceived gaps in access to segments of the population, cultural and contextual frameworks, local level governance structures, and development needs. While the HTTs, PRTs and DSTs typically operate within a joint civil-military organizational structure, the FETs are distinguished by their purely military character, as well as their somewhat ad hoc assignment of personnel with arguably little discernible background or training relevant to the job. The issue of training and methodology of FETs is especially important due to the sensitivity of their mission (i.e., working with women in a conservative and often dangerous environment) and the trajectory toward which it takes the military, into what has been a purely civilian domain

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<sup>5</sup> David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria, 1956–1958* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006): 105.

(gender work). From a civil-military perspective, while the FETs do not appear to be doing any harm, are they really doing anything lasting and meaningful for the Afghan women?

The actual mission of the FETs is likewise important to elucidate and analyze if the program is to become integral to COIN theory and practice in other theaters: the role of FETs in COIN strategy must be clearly defined. The program's focus is likewise relevant from a development perspective, both in terms of protecting the beneficiaries and maintaining the integrity of the program in order to ensure its success and provide lessons learned for follow-on missions. The distinctions between its variously-reported aims are important at every level—from the value-added of a FET for a ground-level commander, to the degree to which local or international NGOs/agencies will be willing to collaborate and, probably most importantly, how the program will be perceived (and therefore allowed to operate) by the Afghan men in the area of operations.

From a policy perspective, the FETs can be included in recent debates about women in combat. As recently as February 2012, the Department of Defense revised its policy on women in combat, now officially sanctioning women's inclusion at the battalion level.<sup>6</sup> While women are still precluded from serving at the front lines in war, the Pentagon's decision could positively impact the ability of enablers such as the Female Engagement Teams to integrate more effectively with maneuver units. Whereas FETs previously were pulled back to the regimental level at certain intervals, the new policy could entail permanent assignment to a battalion, thereby greatly increasing planning capability, continuity, cohesion, and overall effectiveness.

Understanding these aspects of the FETs—their role in development, the overall aim of the mission, and how they fit into an evolving U.S. military policy—can better inform the debate on COIN and its enabling partners in population-centric warfare. As the military takes on an ever-increasing role in the civil dimension, the FET program will

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<sup>6</sup> Elisabeth Bumiller, "Pentagon Allows Women Closer to Combat, but Not Close Enough for Some," *New York Times*, February 9, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/us/pentagon-to-loosen-restrictions-on-women-in-combat.html>.

be one of a number of programs that will need to determine its legacy post-Iraq and Afghanistan. From a strategy perspective, the aims and results of the program are relevant to understanding how U.S. military leaders view the role of indigenous women in the success of COIN, as well as how inter-agency cooperation and civil-military relations are evolving. From a tactical and operational standpoint, the use of FETs is important to the continuing debate on women in combat.

### **C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES**

The Female Engagement Team concept can trace its roots back to Operation Iraqi Freedom when, recognizing the need for “culturally-sensitive search methods,” the Marines developed the Lioness Program whereby female Marines were able to establish search capability of Iraqi females at Marine installations in Anbar province.<sup>7</sup> While by all accounts the Lioness Program proved successful in Iraq in the realm of security, its evolution into engagement of female Marines with the local female population in Afghanistan raises the question of whether or not there is a line where the role of the military should stop and where the civilian dimension should begin. Had the FETs been uniquely a task for the Marines’ Civil Affairs Group (CAG), the question might largely be irrelevant as CAG Marines would necessarily have already undergone extensive training on working within local populations and coordinating with civilian development actors;<sup>8</sup> however, as mentioned above, FET Marines were largely pulled from across various military occupation specialties and received little training. The lack of Civil Affairs experience and training among the early FETs almost certainly inhibited their

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<sup>7</sup> Jessica Aranda, “Lioness Program Trains, Maintains Female Search Teams,” *Operation New Dawn—Official Website of US Forces—Iraq*, June 13, 2008, [http://www.usf-iraq.com/?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=20372&Itemid=110](http://www.usf-iraq.com/?option=com_content&task=view&id=20372&Itemid=110).

<sup>8</sup> Julia Watson, “Female Engagement Teams: The Case for More Civil Affairs Marines,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, July 2011, <http://www.mca-marines.org/gazette/photo/case-more-female-civil-affairs-marines-1>.

ability to access resources (both within military channels [i.e., CERP funding<sup>9</sup>] and NGO networks) necessary to carry out programs for local women.<sup>10</sup>

When a commander in the field is confronted with an enabler such as a FET, his first consideration is likely to be an evaluation of the assets required for the enabler to carry out its mission weighed against the value of whatever the enabler promises to bring. In the case of a FET, a commander would need to place a premium on access to women in his area of operations in order to justify committing significant human and material resources necessary to support the mission. This could include: providing life support for female Marines (who would require their own separate billeting and hygiene areas), mounting of patrols, use of funding sources for small projects, etc. Assuming that the value of good intelligence is immeasurable—and that “one of the most routine, yet most productive, methods of collection is through daily contact with the population”<sup>11</sup>—if a commander sees the FET as another tool in his intelligence toolkit, he is more likely to view it favorably and expend the resources necessary to carry out the FET mission and, hopefully, gain valuable intelligence. If, on the other hand, he views the FET as a burden with no discernible result—or does not view it as an intelligence gathering resource but simply as a feel-good way to empower women—then it is difficult to see what effort he might put into resourcing the mission. How the FET mission will be viewed is highly dependent on how it is marketed to those who must give up their own resources for it. In addition, how the local populace views the FETs will ultimately determine the value they can bring, whether through intelligence or influence. This is where the actual intent of the FET mission must be clearly articulated, particularly to a line commander. While it is easy to find articles that mention FET and intelligence together, an actual 2010 recommendation to COMISAF—*Engaging the Female Populace*—goes to great lengths

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<sup>9</sup> United States Army, Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), *Commander’s Guide to Money as a Weapons System Handbook 09-27*, (April 2009): 13, <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/call/docs/09-27/09-27.pdf>. CERP is the Commanders Emergency Response Program which “enables local commanders in Afghanistan and Iraq to respond...to urgent, small-scale, humanitarian relief, and reconstruction projects and services that immediately assist the indigenous population...”

<sup>10</sup> Watson, “Female Engagement Teams: The Case for More Civil Affairs Marines.”

<sup>11</sup> David J. Clark, “The Vital Role of Intelligence in Counterinsurgency Operations,” (Strategy Research Project , U.S. Army War College, 2006): 17, <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA448457>.

to distinguish FET from intelligence gatherers (such as Female Human Exploitation Teams) and those focused on both lethal and non-lethal efforts (versus the FETs' focus solely on the non-lethal).<sup>12</sup> Despite this recommendation to the highest levels for the FETs to remain outside the realm of intelligence gathering, it is challenging to separate the program from intelligence (for all involved—both coalition actors and the local populace) when news articles explicitly make the connection.<sup>13</sup> If the perceptions of those who come into contact with the FET program (e.g., the local population or even NGOS) are that one of its purposes is gathering intelligence, then the integrated, civil-military, whole of government approach that underpins COIN theory and strategy could be placed in jeopardy.

This thesis hypothesizes that the Female Engagement Teams, while deployed in greater numbers to engage Afghan women since 2010, suffered early on from the absence of a defined mission, resulting in a lack of integration into a coherent operational concept. The absence of an operational vision filters down to the tactical level where the FETs could be viewed as ad hoc organizations recruited at random, poorly trained, and inadequately resourced. Synthesis of reports and lessons learned by the military, measured against civilian development actors (USAID), can yield recommendations for the military on how better to utilize the FET program. The new Department of Defense policy about women in combat will also play a role going forward as the FET mission can redefine itself in relation to its level of operations.

#### **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

As the FET program is relatively recent, and not highly visible outside of military/COIN environments, there is a limited amount of objective—and development-related—literature available. The resources used for this thesis will be analyzed from a three-tiered approach; beginning with sources addressing the FET program specifically, gender/development work in Afghanistan and, finally, COIN/Stability Operations in general.

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<sup>12</sup> Vedder, “Engaging the Female Populace,” 10–11.

<sup>13</sup> Jones, “Woman to Woman in Afghanistan.”

The vast majority of FET-specific literature is derived from news articles, briefing materials and recommendations/lessons learned, and a limited number of reports from defense industry contractors. Much of this first batch of literature started appearing in 2010, following the first FETs' deployment to Afghanistan, when the program started to garner media attention. While the briefing materials go a long way toward understanding how the program was introduced to military audiences, the recommendations to NATO/International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) issued early in 2010 provide what is probably the most comprehensive look at the program from all aspects and can serve as a starting point for subsequent findings.<sup>14</sup> News articles that drew attention to the program at this same time, while they provide anecdotal bites on the operations of FETs in the field, typically provide only shallow coverage of the issues, justification, and challenges of the FETs, and are tailored to audiences that will have limited appreciation for the inherent complexities of such a program.

Approaches to gender work in Afghanistan specifically—and in security operations, globally—have been covered extensively, though often by and for a civilian audience of development theorists and practitioners. Much of this literature uses as a reference the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on gender equality.<sup>15</sup> One of the strengths of the articles and studies put forth by gender and development specialists is the ability to frame current efforts in both a historical and cultural context, outside the realm of military operations, though often with security as an overlying condition. Significantly, this literature tends to focus on the need for coordination, sincere efforts at critically analyzing results of various gender programs, and the connection between women and larger political processes in Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup>

COIN/Stability Operations literature, both as doctrinal reference—via military field manuals (Civil Military Operations/Stability Operations)—and through scholarly

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<sup>14</sup> Vedder, “Engaging the Female Populace,” 7–16.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Security Council (SC), Resolution 1325, October 31, 2000, [http://www.un.org/events/res\\_1325e.pdf](http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Orzala Ashraf Nemat, “Afghan Women at the Crossroads: Agents of Peace—Or its Victims?”, *The Century Foundation*, March 25, 2011, 3–31, <http://tcf.org/publications/2011/3/afghan-women-at-the-crossroads-agents-of-peace2014or-its-victims>.

work, tends to focus on the population and its culture, the integration of civilian and military assets and capabilities, and the importance of intelligence.<sup>17</sup> These are all aspects the FET mission addresses in varying degrees. The contemporary COIN literature, while it does not treat gender efforts extensively (nor is it intended to), does provide an overarching strategic framework within which military programs that cross into the civil dimension should be studied. The Army's *Tactics in Counterinsurgency FM 3-24.2* does promote female engagements—"Co-opting neutral or friendly women, through targeted social and economic programs, builds networks of enlightened self-interest that eventually undermine the insurgents"<sup>18</sup>—yet there has been seemingly little comparison of David Galula's emphasis on women to current COIN (with regard to female engagement) strategy.

The literature surveyed tends to support the idea that the Female Engagement Teams are producing results at the micro-level, contributing to overall stability efforts, and pushing the Marine Corps in new directions with regard to how it can engage the local populace. Master Sergeant Julia Watson of the USMC has provided an extensive article on the complexities of the mission vis-à-vis efficiency and appropriate personnel and has covered the program with a critical eye from inside.<sup>19</sup> Where all the writing converges (FET-specific, development-focused, and COIN) is on the importance of gaining the local population's support and buy-in. As fundamental to the success of the mission, the question naturally arises: does foreign military involvement in gender relationships in conservative (especially Muslim) societies help or hurt the mission?

While there is no discernible argument against the importance of women's involvement in community development or COIN, where the literature diverges—or perhaps, more significantly, leaves a gap—is in determining who the appropriate agents of change are when it comes to working with women in conflict zones. Galula aside,

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<sup>17</sup> Brendan McBreen, "Notes on FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency," *USMC*, January 28, 2008, <http://www.2ndbn5thmar.com/coinman/Notes%20on%20FM%203-24%20Counterinsurgency.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Headquarters Department of the Army, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency FM 3-24.2* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2009): Appendix C-6, <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24-2.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Watson, "Female Engagement Teams: The Case for More Civil Affairs Marines."

more contemporary COIN literature largely neglects the military role in engaging women; however, in the absence of civilians, the military seems to have taken on this role without much forethought as to its organization or impact. As a result, the FET program is a candidate for criticism. The civil-military dimension of the FET program is rarely addressed, if at all.

In general, objective and critical literature specifically related to the FET program is lacking from sources outside the Marine Corps; however, this provides an opportunity to measure the effectiveness of the program within other contexts, as well as through the civil-military dimension and COIN. One area in which it is challenging to gain a depth of knowledge is the role of intelligence in the FET mission. This is due in part to the inherent shroud of secrecy in defining what is included in intelligence operations and simply the vague mandate of the FETs.

#### **E. METHODS AND SOURCES**

This thesis will analyze the evolution of the FET program in Afghanistan through a study of available documents and articles since the inception of the FETs' precursor program (the Lioness Program in Iraq) to the ways forward for such military initiatives post-Iraq and Afghanistan. By holding up the published successes and lessons learned from the program against available literature from civilian development publications, the relevance of the program to civilian efforts will also be considered.

Available unclassified FET reports will be studied to provide ground-level truth in order to evaluate stated goals of the mission against actual results and achievements. In order to provide a fair and balanced analysis—to account for improvements made to the program since its development—this research will attempt to cover as much data with regional and temporal variation as is available.

#### **F. THESIS OVERVIEW**

In order to introduce the reader to the FET concept, this thesis will continue with an introductory Chapter II that places the FET program in the context of COIN theory and doctrine. Chapter III will explain the background of the program; to include its

evolution from the Lioness Program to its current iteration in Afghanistan, and summarizing the personnel mechanics of establishing a Female Engagement Team, a synopsis of the training undertaken, and a general summary of deployed teams' missions. Chapter IV will examine the FETs from a civil-military perspective with regard to cooperation and conflict. Finally, Chapter V will make a determination as to the overall effectiveness of the program and synthesize the results of findings to assess whether the program can and should be replicated in other theaters of operation and, if so, with what adjustments.

## II. COIN THEORY AND DOCTRINE

### A. INTRODUCTION

The need to influence attitudes and behaviours is a central tenant of counterinsurgency campaigns. Here, both sides are competing for the attitudes of a wider population. To defeat the enemy, the counterinsurgent must persuade the wider population that his favoured outcome is both preferable and inevitable, and must also persuade the insurgent that he has no realistic chance of influencing them himself. Influence, then, is as integral to counterinsurgency as to all war.<sup>20</sup>

As the statement above illustrates, COIN theorists maintain that persuasion and “influence” are central to the success of counterinsurgency campaigns. The assumption is that the population is “biddable,”<sup>21</sup> so that the incumbent power can win popular loyalty through demonstrations of efficiency, good governance, and programs that raise standards of living and hence remove grievances that fuel insurgencies. Since the War of Algerian Independence (1954–1962) at least, counterinsurgents led by David Galula have opined that persuading women that their lives and those of their families will be improved by supporting the incumbent government is critical to success.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, counterinsurgency campaigns must design programs that specifically target women. During this author’s time with USAID in Afghanistan from 2009–2011, it had become almost a cliché to tout the supposedly positive impact that outreach to females would have on the counterinsurgency fought by Coalition Forces. Recent military doctrine, building on conventional COIN wisdom, acknowledges that an approach that disregards women fails to focus on half of our target. David Galula, the French officer and counterinsurgency theorist whose works have formed the basis for much of the current

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<sup>20</sup> Kenneth Payne, “Some Principles for Influence in Counterinsurgency,” *British Army Review*, no. 150 (Winter 2010–2011): 23, <http://kennethpayne.squarespace.com/storage/Kenneth%20Payne%20-%20Some%20principles%20for%20influence%20in%20counterinsurgency.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>22</sup> Galula, *Pacification in Algeria*, vi, 105.

U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, referred to women in Algeria as the “largest group of potential supporters”<sup>23</sup> and logical ally due to their “subjugated condition,”<sup>24</sup> who could be mobilized for intelligence gathering and dissemination of information.<sup>25</sup> An appeal to women also forms in a counterinsurgency context a type of counter-mobilization, like organizing local militias or home guards, as a tactic to absorb manpower that might otherwise be recruited by the insurgency. In Galula’s Algeria, about 2000 women served the ranks of the *Armée de Libération Nationale* (ALN) by 1956 as nurses, couriers and in other non-combatant, largely logistical duties. Those numbers would no doubt have been higher had the insurgency’s leadership not discouraged their enlistment for moral reasons.<sup>26</sup> Women also played a vital role in 1956–1957 during *The Battle of Algiers*, to enforce boycotts and strikes, organize demonstrations, smuggle weapons and supplies, plant bombs, disseminate propaganda, as intelligence gatherers, and so on, to the point that they became “the lifeblood of the maquis.”<sup>27</sup> As soon as the ALN secured an area, they appealed to the women for practical support. Recognizing the central importance of women in the Algerian insurgency, the French gave Muslim women the vote, expanded female education, and created 223 mobile medical units by 1961 whose purpose was to encourage “Muslim women to participate in public life.”<sup>28</sup>

French outreach to Muslim women was not simply a tactic of counter-mobilization, however. More importantly, by becoming the champion of women’s rights in education, politics, and the law, the counterinsurgent is able to position himself as a modernizer whose progressive ideas and attitudes more accurately reflect globalized, enlightened Western values, in contrast to the antediluvian attitudes toward women of traditionalist Islamic-based insurgencies. “I thought that the Kabyle women, given their

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 166–67.

<sup>24</sup> Galula, *Pacification in Algeria*, 105.

<sup>25</sup> Galula, *Pacification in Algeria*, 190–91.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Evans, *Algeria: France’s Undeclared War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 173–75.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 125–26, 173–75, 203–05, 249–50, 330.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

subjugated condition, would naturally be on our side if we emancipated them.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, Galula saw Muslim women as an oppressed category of humanity who could be won over by gender-specific reforms. The latest joint U.S. military COIN doctrine, *FM 3-24.2*, owes much to Galula, including his belief that women hold the key to victory for both sides, although it stops short of calling for their “emancipation.” It also enlists David Kilcullen to make the case for female engagement:

Most insurgent fighters are men. But in traditional societies, women are hugely influential in forming the social networks that insurgents use for support. Co-opting neutral or friendly women, through targeted social and economic programs, builds networks of enlightened self-interest that eventually undermine the insurgents. You need your own female counterinsurgents, including interagency people, to do this effectively. Win the women, and you own the family unit. Own the family, and you take a big step forward in mobilizing the population.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, because insurgencies are political, military, and social organizations that graft themselves onto society, women become vital for their success.

Building “networks of enlightened self-interest” is a lofty goal in the best of scenarios. The above excerpt from *FM 3-24.2* implies that COIN success hinges on the ability of forces to garner and exploit the support of women, who will bring the rest of the population with them. While perhaps laudable in its (albeit) feeble attempt to address women, *FM 3-24.2*, the 2009 update of 2007’s *FM 3-24* COIN doctrine, neglects to a large degree Galula’s focus on the requirement to win over women in a counterinsurgency. If women are critical to COIN success, why does *FM 3-24.2* devote so little attention to them? On what assumptions is a strategy of female outreach based? That women have different interests than men? That they do not share broader societal grievances that spur insurgency in the first place? That they actually share the Western view that they are an oppressed gender, who can be induced to give up their central role as wives and mothers, providers of male heirs who solidify social relationships through arranged marriages and clan and family ties? How realistic is the assumption fundamental

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<sup>29</sup> Galula, *Pacification in Algeria*, 105.

<sup>30</sup> Headquarters Department of the Army, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, Appendix C-6.

to COIN that small-scale development projects carried out by the military (even with the collaboration of the interagency) can implicitly turn the tides of women's oppression in a place like Afghanistan?

Galula was willing to concede that outreach to marginalized Muslim women was an intelligence collection strategy,<sup>31</sup> something which the U.S. military has been loath to do, at least publically or consistently. Whether FETs should take on an intelligence-gathering mission is worthy of its own debate because it speaks to the core purpose of their mission. Classic COIN theory maintains that intelligence collection is vital for success in a war among the people. If forces can win "hearts and minds," therefore, then intelligence will follow; however, the fact that contemporary U.S. COIN doctrine authors have neglected the intelligence benefits of female engagement perhaps speaks to skepticism that "social and economic programs" targeting women that FETs might undertake could actually lead to female "emancipation" that would cause women to sway their families and communities to the side of the counterinsurgents.

While it is useful to measure the current U.S. COIN doctrine (insofar as its treatment of women) against Galula's own work—particularly because a significant portion of the COIN doctrine takes from aspects of Galula's experiences—this is not to say that Galula provided a comprehensive analysis of women's roles or usefulness in counterinsurgency. This chapter seeks to address how Galula envisioned—and incorporated—women into his own strategies and to what extent this was brought forth into U.S. military doctrine. General (joint Army-Marine Corps) COIN doctrine will be analyzed to the extent that it provides some overarching principles on the justification for engaging women in COIN, the means to do it, and the best actors to carry out this work.

## **B. GALULA IN ALGERIA**

In the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962) French Army Captain David Galula was confronted with the task of trying to "pacify" the insurgent-infiltrated Kabylia district. His experience there, which he captured in *Pacification in Algeria, 1956–1958*,

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<sup>31</sup> Galula, *Pacification in Algeria*, 190–91.

makes multiple, though fairly superficial, references to the work he and his soldiers undertook with regard to the local women. Galula surmised that “Kabyle women, given their subjugated condition, would naturally be on our side if we emancipated them.”<sup>32</sup> Though it is not entirely clear what Galula’s definition of “emancipation” was, he did attempt to garner support of the women via (forced) education of girls and provision of medical care which, in his assessment, had a positive effect on his relations with the locals.<sup>33</sup> Reading Galula’s account of his methods for accessing the women, it is clear that as a Tunisian born Jew who grew up in Casablanca, he fully understood the cultural limitations of his environment and used a relatively simple approach to refine and improve his campaign to win the “hearts and minds” of the women in his zone in the Kabylia.

At first glance, the Kabyle women in Galula’s zone share common traits with the women of rural Afghanistan, and so might be expected to respond to the same pacification outreach techniques. Galula’s resourcing of medical professionals to care for the local population (including women) foreshadows the Vietnam-era (and modern-day) MEDCAP (Medical Civic Action Program), a common—and usually popular—method for winning “hearts and minds” by military forces in areas with few resources or accessible medical services.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, Galula’s use of education as a means of connecting with the population resonates with contemporary endeavors of the military to build and refurbish schools, distribute school supplies, and generally treat education as an easy and cost-effective way to curry favor with a potentially distrustful population. Medical care and education allow for measurable signs of progress to attract cooperation and encourage support for the incumbent, while limiting opportunities for corruption, a hazard in other forms of development. While education and health initiatives seemed to have worked for Galula in Algeria—and are often the cornerstone of contemporary Civil

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<sup>32</sup> Galula, *Pacification in Algeria*, 105.

<sup>33</sup> Galula, *Pacification in Algeria*, 105, 122, 165.

<sup>34</sup> Robert J. Wilensky, “Military Medicine to Win the Hearts and Minds and Aid to Civilians in the Vietnam War,” *Army Historical Foundation*, 2004, <http://www.armyhistory.org/ahf2.aspx?pgID=877&id=369&exCompID=56>.

Affairs programs—are they really contributing to COIN efforts in Afghanistan when undertaken through programs such as the Female Engagement Teams?

### C. MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN CIVILIAN TASKS

Confusion in assumptions about the purpose and outcomes of female engagement are reflected in the organization of these tasks. While it does not specifically address working with women, Galula's better-known work—*Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*—does address one important aspect of the functions of COIN which could be held up against FET operations; namely, the military temporarily assuming traditional civilian tasks in order to fill gaps and then turning over those tasks to civilians at the earliest opportunity possible.<sup>35</sup> Galula rightfully argues that individual military personnel “must be prepared to become a propagandist, a social worker, a civil engineer, a schoolteacher, a nurse, a boy scout. But only for as long as he cannot be replaced, for it is better to entrust civilian tasks to civilians.”<sup>36</sup> The practice of soldiers assuming traditional civilian tasks is referred to by scholars such as Hew Strachan as “civil-military fusion.”<sup>37</sup> While civil-military interagency cooperation is a virtue in some situations like disaster relief, in COIN environments the assumption of civilian tasks by the military can lead to politicization. These tasks to which Galula refers fall under the rubric of “stability operations” which “focus on addressing the root causes that allowed to [sic] insurgency to come into existence.”<sup>38</sup> Whereas military doctrine such as *FM 3-24.2* recognizes the need for interagency approaches (i.e., inclusion of civilian expertise) to these tasks, there has not been much evidence that military-initiated programs like FETs are planned, executed, and monitored in a sustainable manner, or that the military has executed due diligence in planning for civilian handover. Of course, if FET development projects or engagements are simply a means of gaining the trust of women in order to collect intelligence, then handover of engagements/projects would be difficult to coordinate with

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<sup>35</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 1964): 62.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Hew Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 164–65.

<sup>38</sup> Headquarters Department of the Army, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, 3-6–7, 7-1.

the appropriate civilians, or even undesirable as it would separate operational units from an important intelligence source. Again, the issue of intelligence in the FET mission should shape much of the debate on the means and ends of the engagements and projects undertaken: unfortunately, a definitive answer on the role of intelligence in FETs remains unclear.

#### **D. EFFECT ON COIN**

For all of the COIN literature and its references to engaging women, or lack of them, it is hard to point to concrete evidence of how this has shaped operations to the point where the military’s targeting of women for winning “hearts and minds”—or even gathering information—has greatly influenced the COIN fight in Afghanistan. It is even harder to find specific examples of how the COIN guidance of ensuring the interagency cooperation has been incorporated into FET planning (other than as vague directives). But to expect any results from programs such as the FETs is to assume that COIN and its fundamental principles are the answer to the current problem in Afghanistan. Critics of COIN like Douglas Porch would include the FET concept as illustrative of “apply[ing] paternalistic theories onto populations that will be grateful for their improved conditions, and who will reject the bad actors in their midst.”<sup>39</sup> This certainly seems to be the premise behind both Galula’s efforts at “pacification” in Kabylia and the efforts of those advocating for military personnel to engage women in Afghanistan in order to garner the support of half the population so as to bring the population to the side of the counterinsurgents.

According to LisaRe Brooks, a Social Scientist with the Human Terrain Systems in Regional Command East, working with women in Afghanistan—specifically, as part of the FET program—becomes a fundamental part of COIN efforts by “building relationships with the Afghan women to earn their trust, give them confidence in GiroA [Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan], and divide them from those that

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<sup>39</sup> Douglas Porch, “The Dangerous Myths and Dubious Promise of COIN,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 22, no. 2 (May 2011): 246, 251.

violate their constitutional rights.”<sup>40</sup> Like most of the references to aims of improving Afghan women’s situations within the existing FET literature, these aspirations are well-intentioned, if in this author’s estimation overly ambitious. Women’s—indeed any Afghan’s—confidence in the Government of Afghanistan is not likely to be built around small teams of U.S. military personnel with limited or no development/governance experience conducting sporadic engagements. Brooks’ “desired endstates [sic]” for female engagements include “women influence(ing) others (women) to demand basic services from the local government (with coalition force support).”<sup>41</sup> Though it might be a simple bullet in a presentation, meant to illustrate the importance of empowering women, a program designed to embolden women in a society as traditional and conservative as that of rural Afghanistan is not without risks and should not be undertaken in a vacuum. Governance work, whereby local governments and their citizenry are brought closer together, is not simply a bottom-up effort which can be expected to succeed when marginalized segments of the population (e.g., women) are emboldened to make demands of their governments. Whether or not FETs on the ground ever undertook such initiatives—and what might have resulted—is not part of Brooks’ presentation; however, one can only hope that such naïve directives are not issued to Marines being trained as part of the FET program or as general COIN direction.

Fortunately, others who have written about the FET program at higher levels have made the leap from ground-level COIN tactics in engaging women to governance work and sustainable development. Probably the most comprehensive document to detail the importance, methodology, and challenges of the FET program was the report issued to the Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in February 2010 (unclassified version released in 2011).<sup>42</sup> While the report underscores the centrality of female outreach to the success of COIN operations, it also emphasizes collection of information (as distinct from intelligence), and ties this to the ability for commanders to

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<sup>40</sup> LisaRe Brooks, “Female Engagement Teams (FET),” *COIN Academy*, October 28, 2010, [cryptome.org/dodi/FET.pptx](http://cryptome.org/dodi/FET.pptx).

<sup>41</sup> LisaRe Brooks, “Female Engagement Teams (FET).”

<sup>42</sup> Vedder, “Engaging the Female Populace.”

make informed decisions about projects and programs, both for Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds programmed by military personnel and longer-term efforts of development workers.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, and importantly, the report makes a case for separation of FET personnel from those gathering intelligence (Female HUMINT Exploitation Teams) for lethal targeting purposes. As the report notes, this is vital because a less-than-marked distinction could arouse suspicion in the indigenous population if FETs collect for the purposes of targeting, and so put male family members at risk. This can be a difficult issue to overcome if there is a shortage of female military personnel to form separate FET and HET teams, as tends to be the case at the ground level in such conflict zones.<sup>44</sup> It may also be the case that locals will be unable to distinguish between the two teams and so avoid contact with both.

While certainly few (if any) would advocate intentionally neglecting women in COIN operations, the means—and ends—for engagements with women must be carefully considered. Sasha Mehra, in her case for “Equal Opportunity Counterinsurgency,” explains that U.S. COIN efforts in Afghanistan have fallen short of expectations mainly because male Marines do not have access to the local women. Afghan women are not represented at public gatherings (such as council meetings) where Marines would typically encounter the local, influential members of the population.<sup>45</sup> Socially, women are sequestered. There is no doubt that Afghan women were not high on the radar of commanders and tacticians for the first several years of Operation Enduring Freedom. Although Galula’s influence on engaging women was present in the first iteration of *FM 3-24*, published in 2007, it took a few more years before the Marine Corps made its first concerted attempts at formalizing a program to engage the women in a manner that expanded the program beyond security (as the Lioness program had done in Iraq) and delved into longer-term, relationship-building efforts. As Watson states, civil military

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 7–13, 53.

<sup>44</sup> Vedder, “Engaging the Female Populace,” 10–11.

<sup>45</sup> Sasha Mehra, “Equal Opportunity Counterinsurgency: The Importance of Afghan Women in U.S. Counterinsurgency Operations” (master’s thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, November 6, 2010): 14–15, <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA524128&Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf>.

operations (CMO) are necessary “during all phases of operations,”<sup>46</sup> so, by extension, FETs should be properly equipped and trained to operate during any phase of COIN operations.

#### **E. A PHASED APPROACH**

Galula focuses on female engagement in a manner akin to the way the FETs in Afghanistan are used—to build rapport through assistance and monitor progress during the hold and build phases. Nevertheless, there are opportunities for female Marines to be used during clearing operations, which could provide an even more beneficial occasion for relationship-building, leading to enhanced engagements in the hold and build phases. Early on in the FET program (winter 2010), FET Marines assigned in Garmsir District, Helmand Province were able to provide valuable support to the battalion by gathering the women of a village while male Marines cleared homes. The FET was able to establish a presence with the permission of the male elders, then gather the village women in one location (one elder’s home) where they could be searched out of sight of male Marines. Following the search, the FET handed out hygiene supplies and engaged the women to discuss problems in the area, concerns about the U.S. military presence, and establish rapport to inculcate a favorable perception about the U.S. military presence. Although cautious at first, the Afghan women quickly warmed up to the FET and were keen to engage on all topics of conversation.<sup>47</sup> *FM 3-24.2* makes multiple references to using female military personnel to search local females in COIN operations, and the need to engage women to influence familial perceptions, but it stops short at making the connection on how groups of military females can be harnessed to provide on-going support from the clear phase straight through to the longer-term build phase.<sup>48</sup>

Although the aforementioned FET case in Garmsir proved successful in gaining access to local women during clearing operations, and was welcomed relatively warmly by the local villagers (both male and female), the means of measuring the success of the

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<sup>46</sup> Watson, “Female Engagement Teams: The Case for More Civil Affairs Marines.”

<sup>47</sup> Author’s observation while deployed with USAID in Helmand, Afghanistan in 2009–2011.

<sup>48</sup> Headquarters Department of the Army, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, 5-10–15, C-6.

engagements with regard to COIN remained imprecise. Because this took place during the first FET deployment to this particular district, the female Marines were only operational for several weeks and were thinly spread to cover several villages throughout the area of operations. This did not allow for multiple visits to the same area (two to three at most) and, clearly, this is not enough time to build up the requisite amount of trust necessary to gather useful information or to execute development projects which could lead to improved situations for the local women. Though the FET was usually welcomed, whether or not it came bearing aid, the value of these visits was never determined. Platoon and company level commanders appeared keen to measure success based on numbers of engagements and numbers of women seen or treated by the female Navy Corpsman; however, this is hardly a reliable indicator of success when comparing this with *FM 3-24.2*'s references to the benefits of engaging women.<sup>49</sup>

#### **F. “ARMED SOCIAL WORK”<sup>50</sup>**

David Kilcullen states that “Counterinsurgency is armed social work: an attempt to redress basic social and political problems...”<sup>51</sup> This is reiterated in *FM 3-24.2*.<sup>52</sup> As such, the Female Engagement Team concept seems to have been designed with this in mind:

With a better understanding of the sources of instability in the villages and district centers, we will be able to support GIRoA, the local government officials, ANSF [Afghan National Security Forces] to improve upon those areas and have the side effect of reducing the security concerns through the programs and efforts that we can facilitate to address those needs and concerns.<sup>53</sup>

While Kilcullen makes multiple references to the FETs in his book *Counterinsurgency*, he also mentions, separately, the importance of designing culturally appropriate programs that are not the product of what the counterinsurgents might

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<sup>49</sup> Author's observation while deployed with USAID in Helmand, Afghanistan in 2009–2011.

<sup>50</sup> David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (NY, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010): 43.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Headquarters Department of the Army, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, Appendix C-7.

<sup>53</sup> Vedder, “Engaging the Female Populace,” 27.

perceive to be useful for a particular community.<sup>54</sup> While important in any environment, this is particularly applicable in a highly conservative country where the role of women is circumscribed and their interactions with outsiders can be highly sensitive. Whereas Galula's prescriptions for engaging women, based on his efforts in Algeria, have been incorporated into U.S. COIN doctrine—and even made operational by way of FETs, like Kilcullen's focus on social work—a closer look at the situation of the Algerian women in Galula's time shows that his experience engaging women in Kabylia was not entirely relevant to the military's interaction with women in Afghanistan today. As Martin Evans points out, many Muslim women took an active role in the Algerian Independence War because they shared the view of their men that the French misrule and the harshness of COIN tactics affected both genders. Many concluded that "liberation" would come with the victory of the *Front de Libération National* (FLN), not through grudging French social, medical, and educational programs.<sup>55</sup> While there was one famous incident of Muslim women who publicly burned their veils in May 1958,<sup>56</sup> the women of rural, southwest Afghanistan, where Marine FETs operate, have showed no inclination to burn their burqas, nor do they have much opportunity for participation in any kind of political affairs.

## **G. PERCEIVED GAPS**

It seems by all accounts that U.S. COIN doctrine (and the FET program by extension) has led to what Porch refers to as "minimalist interpretation of Galula's prescription" (small projects aimed at health and education in order to increase sympathy toward the counterinsurgent).<sup>57</sup> It is admirable that the Marines have attempted to create initiatives which respond to perceived gaps in either access to the population or basic empowerment of marginalized segments of society. For better or worse, COIN doctrine

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<sup>54</sup> Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*, 47.

<sup>55</sup> Evans, *Algeria*, 173–75, 203–05, 249–50, 331.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>57</sup> Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: The Origins, Development and Myths of the New Way of War* (forthcoming manuscript).

has propelled this shift toward having the military assume civilian outreach.<sup>58</sup> While most COIN literature emphasizes having civilians carry out civilian tasks, the likelihood of having available, qualified civilians to work with the military on programs such as FET—assuming the FET program even attempted to find them—is slim, and even more challenging would be the mechanisms for embedding and integrating such civilians within a military unit, although this is being done with Human Terrain Teams and District Support Teams. Without the ability to do this, it is no surprise that the Marines have attempted to take on this task themselves. Armed women in uniform are probably not the ideal means to engage women in rural Afghanistan: their presence entails a much more visible security posture—which can bring unwanted attention and suspicion—and Afghan villagers are well aware that most military units will not have an enduring presence. Despite this, perhaps at a minimum, FETs can gain information to help guide commanders and Civil Affairs Marines toward receptive segments of a community or potential projects for CERP funds. FETs have been touted as an innovative approach to accessing women in Afghanistan for purposes of COIN. While there does not appear to have been any evidence of negative consequences of FET engagements (i.e., targeting of women after engaging with FETs) the question of whether or not the FETs are truly contributing to COIN efforts in Afghanistan remains unanswered. This is not to say that the women of Afghanistan should be ignored in COIN efforts—or ignored entirely by the military—but more focus should be put on employing qualified civilians or military Civil Affairs units to undertake such tasks.

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<sup>58</sup> John A. Nagl, foreword to *Counterinsurgency Field Manual FM 3-24* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007): xvii.

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### III. EVOLUTION OF FEMALE ENGAGEMENT TEAMS

#### A. THE LIONESS PROGRAM IN IRAQ

The Female Engagement Teams as employed most recently by the U.S. military trace their roots to Iraq in 2004, when the insurgency began to use women to transport concealed weapons and other illegal items, and even to carry out suicide attacks.<sup>59</sup> The use of women in insurgency should have come as no surprise. For instance, during the War for Algerian Independence, the *Front de Libération National* (FLN) insurgency employed women as couriers, to organize strikes and boycotts, as nurses and in a logistical and support role. As a consequence, the French were forced to reply with an organized, if largely unsuccessful, program to attract their loyalty.<sup>60</sup>

As the insurgency in Iraq caught the Pentagon unprepared, it was left to troops on the ground to improvise solutions. With a focus on responding in a culturally appropriate manner, the United States Marine Corps launched the Lioness program in 2004. Female Marines volunteered to serve with ground combat units for a period of one to two months—in itself a significant move and perhaps a sign of desperation for a U.S. military that banned women from combat at the time. The new program allowed for female-on-female searches, female presence during house searches and, eventually, mentoring of Iraqi females on tactics for conducting their own search operations.<sup>61</sup>

In this way, the Lioness program was not developed as part of a coherent COIN strategy, but rather as an operational necessity. Even though David Galula argues that female outreach is central to a successful COIN strategy, especially in Muslim societies, references in *FM 3-24.2* to the importance of females do not offer much in the way of realistic approaches or strategy. *FM 3-24.2* did improve upon its earlier iteration (*FM 3-24*, published in 2007) by including several references to the sensitivity of searching

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<sup>59</sup> Regina T. Akers, “Women in the military ‘In and Out of Harm’s Way,’” *dcmilitary.com*, March 19, 2009, [http://ww2.dcmilitary.com/stories/031909/southpotomac\\_28112.shtml](http://ww2.dcmilitary.com/stories/031909/southpotomac_28112.shtml).

<sup>60</sup> Evans, *Algeria*, 88–89, 126, 173–75, 203–05, 249–50, 331.

<sup>61</sup> Akers, “Women in the military ‘In and Out of Harm’s Way.’”

females. It is curious that the topic of searching females was entirely absent in *FM 3-24* since the Lioness program had been operational for at least two years by the publication of *FM 3-24* in 2007. It appears that the program in Iraq never garnered the military's (or public's) attention to the extent that the FETs did a few years later in Afghanistan. With a much more limited and defined role, the Lioness program was also less controversial than the FETs, perhaps because it did not attempt to take on the role of "social worker."<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, despite the fact that the Lionesses were meant only to conduct searches, measures of effectiveness for such a program were elusive: for example, information on contraband found on females during searches or intelligence gleaned through search operations would likely be classified. Despite this difficulty in gauging quantitative measures, or perhaps because of it, the Lioness program seems to have been considered a success, not only for the contribution it made to security operations in Iraq, but also for the part it played in the on-going debate surrounding women in combat.<sup>63</sup>

The Lioness program was crucial to the success of the Marines in Iraq in that it brought new capabilities to improve search capability, particularly in Anbar where the Marines were concentrated, and reflected the Marine Corps' attempt to adapt to the cultural complexities of this particular combat environment. Importantly, the program set the stage for its replication and evolution in Afghanistan a few years later. This chapter will describe the introduction of the program in Operation Enduring Freedom and its subsequent expansion beyond the security realm and into COIN operations. While the FET program certainly owes much to the pioneers of the Lioness program in Iraq, the FETs in Afghanistan expanded the concept significantly beyond filling gaps in security operations, testimony to an ability to build on lessons learned and adapt to new environments. Whether the second iteration of the Marine Corps strategy of using females in the Global War on Terror was ultimately as successful as that of the Lioness program remains to be seen. But in an attempt to occupy a more central role in COIN operations in Afghanistan, the FET program was forced to adapt to a much more

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<sup>62</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 62.

<sup>63</sup> Nicholas M. Dunn, "Lioness Program 'pride' of the Corps," *Marine Corps News Room*, March 13, 2009, [http://www.marine-corps-news.com/2009/03/lioness\\_program\\_pride\\_of\\_the\\_c.htm](http://www.marine-corps-news.com/2009/03/lioness_program_pride_of_the_c.htm).

complicated and often vaguely defined mission. The problem is that, for these reasons, not to mention the fact that at the time of writing success in Afghanistan remains elusive, it is much more difficult to assess impact and value of the FET program in Afghanistan.

## **B. BRINGING THE CONCEPT TO AFGHANISTAN**

The FET program in Afghanistan began in the same ad hoc way that the Lioness program had in Iraq. One point of note is that, while the Lioness program began relatively soon after the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, it took some time to gain traction in Afghanistan. Only in 2009 did combat units in Afghanistan call for incorporating female Marines in search operations and to assist at checkpoints. One of the precipitating events was a 2009 incident when a burqa-clad male insurgent managed to escape by simply walking out of a compound disguised as a woman.<sup>64</sup> Throughout 2009, FETs became “ad hoc, on-call teams that were fielded upon the request of maneuver units...[and] conducted roughly 70 short-term search and engagement missions.”<sup>65</sup> While it seems that the FETs at this stage were still primarily filling a security function, the concept of expanding into engagements (extended interactions with local women both to provide support and glean information) was an opportunity which the Marines seized upon in order to boost population-centric COIN efforts.

Although, according to the Center for Army Lessons Learned, “the first platoon of female Marines trained as full-time FETs [and] deployed to Afghanistan in March 2010,”<sup>66</sup> the program was already being shopped around at the battalion level in Helmand in late 2009 by a member of the Human Terrain System (who also happened to be an Army Civil Affairs Officer).<sup>67</sup> While seemingly innovative in its approach, and with promises of accessing half of the population that we were reportedly missing up to that point, the program offered up a team of female Marines (along with a female Navy corpsman for medical support) as an enabler to provide search capability and to engage

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<sup>64</sup> United States Army, Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), *Commander’s Guide to Female Engagement Teams*, (September 2011): 4, <http://info.publicintelligence.net/CALL-FETs-V3.pdf>.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Author’s observation while deployed with USAID in Helmand, Afghanistan in 2009–2011.

women (to gauge atmospherics and provide information to the local women on the Marines' efforts in the area of operations). This group of female Marines, the first group of FETs in Garmsir district, spent several weeks actively engaging area women, providing aid (mostly hygiene items and toys), and dispensing basic medical advice. In some instances, while male Marines conducted search operations, the female Marines would gather the village women in one compound in order to explain what the male Marines were doing, discuss security concerns, enquire as to needs of the community, and, generally, establish rapport with the women. In other instances, female engagements would be the primary purpose of a patrol: male Marines and the FET—and sometimes the USAID representative for a short period—would seek out a village elder to gain his permission to meet with a group of women. In most cases, the elder would agree, as long as the engagement took place in his compound and with the male Marines providing perimeter security (i.e., out of sight of the Afghan females). A typical engagement lasted one or two hours and was framed around the presence of the corpsman who provided basic medical treatment and advice, while delivering some very basic medical supplies. The hard life of a rural village woman in Afghanistan, coupled with the sub-standard medical care (if available at all), meant that, in this author's estimation, the FETs were seen as providing a valuable service and were almost always greeted warmly by both the men and women of the villages.

At this early stage in the FET program, before the full-time FETs were on board, the teams were only able to spend a few weeks at a time with the battalion and were therefore not able to establish enduring relationships with a core group of local women. This also hampered the ability to design and execute projects (which could have been supported with either CERP or USAID funds) since the team could not ensure follow-on presence which would have been vital for monitoring and accountability. Also, as several in the team acknowledged, members had not received adequate training in community development, Afghan culture, or project design and implementation. Despite shortcomings such as lack of training and sustained presence, the team—led by an extremely competent, mature, and experienced Gunnery Sergeant—was incredibly enthusiastic and committed to assisting both the maneuver units and the Afghan women.

Subsequent teams that arrived in Garmsir district were equally dedicated to the mission, if not entirely sure of their role. Part of the disparity in teams' understandings of their roles over time seemed to be related to the phase of operations in which they were involved. Teams present for search operations (or through the clear and hold phases) seemed to have a much clearer vision for their utility: providing a female presence during searches, helping to mitigate fears of the women while male Marines entered a village, and following up the clear phase with a continued (albeit for a short span of time) presence to assure villagers, particularly women, that the Marines would continue to provide security. In some sense, the fact they knew they would only be with the battalion during an operation allowed them to focus on the short-term and not delve into the longer-term development or true COIN aims of gaining the (long-term) trust of the people. Teams that were subsequently based at the battalion headquarters, and not involved in clearing operations, seemed to have a more difficult time in establishing their niche within the district. While their activities were more COIN-focused, in trying to maintain lasting relationships with core groups of women in the district center (for example, female medical professionals at the hospital, females who were brave enough to come to the district center's government building, or female relatives of council members from a particular village), they appeared to be valued by the local women more for the material help that they could provide than anything else. The Afghan value on hospitality ensures that guests will be taken care of—as the FETs always were—but it is hard to imagine these relationships as being anything but superficial and limited to an exchange of something (aid, medical advice, or projects—on the part of the FET) and whatever information could be gleaned (from the Afghan women).

In this author's opinion, COIN enthusiasts have overemphasized the impact of the FETs. For instance, a U.S. Army officer who has studied the FETs and their training states that: "Coalition forces are finding that one of the best ways to achieve strategic goals is to use female marines and soldiers to influence the family unit," and that this influence can then spread when younger Afghan women marry and move in with their in-

laws.<sup>68</sup> This assumption is not surprising when one considers the current fascination with COIN. But to presume that a group with little training, little experience in other cultures, and no enduring presence can change social dynamics in a place like Afghanistan is arrogant and absurd. Thankfully, this presumption, if it is common, was not often voiced by the Marines with whom this author came into contact. As with most literature on the FET program, while recognizing that the FETs might be accessing women in an otherwise difficult and unlikely environment, there is rarely a reliable indicator of measurable success. How are they “influencing the family unit” by having limited engagements? If such programs conceded to collecting intelligence then perhaps success could be highlighted. But this is unlikely as this has never been the stated aim of the program (it has only been implied or reported as such by the media),<sup>69</sup> and this would then beg the question of whether or not the appropriate personnel are undertaking the mission.

According to Master Sergeant Julia Watson, who was intimately involved with the FET program in Helmand in 2010, after the 2<sup>d</sup> MEB (Marine Expeditionary Brigade) saw the first ad-hoc teams come to Helmand, I MEF (Marine Expeditionary Force) (and then II MEF) had entire detachments of female Marines dedicated as FETs.<sup>70</sup> Certainly, augmenting units with dedicated FETs was a step in the right direction: unfortunately, the restrictions on women in combat still required a “resetting” of the FETs every 45 days so that they were essentially pulled from the battalions in order to spend time at higher echelons, although this did provide some opportunities for sharing experiences with FETs in other districts. While the program still may have had its weaknesses at this point in 2010, the Marine Corps had made strides to ensure improvements in the overall design, implementation, and training components of the FET program.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Janet R. Holliday, “Female Engagement Teams: The Need to Standardize Training and Employment,” *Military Review* (March–April 2012): 90–91, [http://www.carlisle.army.mil/dime/documents/MilitaryReview\\_Female%20Engagement%20Teams.pdf](http://www.carlisle.army.mil/dime/documents/MilitaryReview_Female%20Engagement%20Teams.pdf)

<sup>69</sup> Jones, “Woman to Woman in Afghanistan.”

<sup>70</sup> Watson, “Female Engagement Teams: The Case for More Civil Affairs Marines.”

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

### C. PERSONNEL SELECTION

The issue of personnel selection for the FET program has been a source of on-going debate since 2009. The disparity in military occupational specialties (MOS), experience, background, and skills has meant that, although there is great diversity in the talents brought to the teams, not all of these skills are necessarily applicable or useful to female engagements in Afghanistan. Unlike reports from Iraq, where the Lionesses reportedly volunteered for the program, the FETs (at least in the initial stages where this author worked) were largely seconded from their units to the program. Secondment, of course, is always a risky proposition in organizations that might use it as an opportunity to off-load underperforming members. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the program seemed to fall short on officers above the rank of Lieutenant, which suggests a dearth of critical leadership to define goals and shape team tactics. Nor is it clear that members “seconded” in an apparently ad hoc and temporary fashion would meet the crucial characteristics needed for FET success (e.g., multicultural experience in development or gender).

Assuming a FET had a medical capability as the entry price to Afghan homes, and most did, two critical members of the team would be the female Navy corpsman and the female interpreter. While the same general skills would apply to these two members, there is a greater margin of error with the linguists, as they are civilians, not held to the same physical fitness levels as the military, and are not always keen to “rough it” in the same way as the military. Additionally, their status as contractors allows them the luxury of leaving whenever they wish or requesting to be reassigned to a different location. Some reports have noted that there have been instances of linguists who were unable physically to maintain the pace of operations,<sup>72</sup> and this author personally witnessed the deployment of a Dari-speaking linguist to a Pashtun area, effectively rendering her incapable of translating, as well as another linguist who, due to medical issues and age, was unable to walk for more than 15 minutes without taking an extended break. Not only can issues such as these be inhibiting factors in the FET’s ability to conduct its job, but

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<sup>72</sup> Matt Pottinger, Hali Jilani, Claire Russo, “Half-Hearted: Trying to Win Afghanistan without Afghan Women,” *Small Wars Journal*, (February 1, 2010), <http://smallwars.org/jrnl/art/trying-to-win-afghanistan-without-afghan-women>.

they can also be considered gross cultural missteps (in the case of the Dari speaker) or a security liability (in the case of the linguist with medical issues), should a patrol come under attack and thus require members of the patrol to move quickly to safety. The importance of a capable and committed linguist cannot be overstated. By virtue of her language skills and cultural familiarity (most are Afghan by origin), she will hold a special place in the team and, more often than not, set the stage for a FET's ability to connect with the village elders and women.

In addition to the linguists, the female Navy corpsmen are key to the success of the team. There is an inherent and palpable awkwardness in entering a rural Afghan village as a foreigner, asking to speak with women, knowing that local women and men might display suspicion (at best) and possibly hostility (at worst). The presence of a female medical provider can have a disarming effect and is a concrete and visible way of offering assistance in a manner that is culturally appropriate, in many cases needed, and non-political or threatening. As mentioned before, Galula used medical outreach in Algeria for its COIN effects: similarly, the FETs use their corpsman as it is a relatively benign way of getting women to open up, begin a conversation about their health, and create trust. If one were to rely on Galula's strategy, it would also lead to an opportunity for gathering intelligence or, at a minimum, gauging atmospherics of a community, which could be useful to the FET and, ultimately, the area maneuver unit.

One possible area of concern with having a medical provider present is that indigenous medical services might be marginalized, humiliated, even "put out of business" by the presence of better-equipped, Western medical staff. This is certainly a concern with full-scale MEDCAPs or Village Medical Outreach, but less of a risk with FETs as their engagements are ephemeral and they can only provide very basic advice and medicine (such as pain relievers).

#### **D. TRAINING**

As the FET program in Afghanistan became formalized in 2010, the Marine Corps went to great lengths to improve training and better equip FET Marines by

establishing a training curriculum “to meet the tenets of the ISAF FET directive.”<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, yet significantly, a common complaint among FETs whom this author met was that training on the actual mission had been somewhat inadequate. This is at once astonishing and yet helps to explain the FETs’ uneven performance to date. Without a mission objective and an organization and training to realize that mission, how could the FETs possibly be prepared? According to Watson, as of July 2011, FET training only included three days of civil military operations (CMO)<sup>74</sup> so how could teams have been expected to understand fully the role of FETs within the overall COIN strategy? Watson was an early advocate of bridging the civil military divide and, in fact, asserts that the FET would be more appropriately undertaken by Civil Affairs Marines.<sup>75</sup>

Overall, FET training has improved significantly since 2009, in no small part due to the Marine Corps’ decision to have dedicated FET Marines who can train together and gain valuable and diverse skills on civil military collaboration. As an early report on the FETs stated, “Poorly trained FETs are probably worse than having no FETs at all.”<sup>76</sup>

## **E. MISSIONS**

As mentioned, the FET program has evolved significantly from simply a security function involving searches of females to more of a COIN-focused effort to influence the population. While the official position is that FETs do not gather intelligence there remains some conflicting information on this or, perhaps more precisely, there is a grey area between what constitutes simple gathering of information and atmospherics—necessary for any informed program of this sort—and collection of intelligence.<sup>77</sup> As Watson notes, the line has been approached, if not fully crossed with “garnering information that has infringed at times into intelligence collection.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> United States Army, Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), *Commander’s Guide to Female Engagement Teams*, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Watson, “Female Engagement Teams: The Case for More Civil Affairs Marines.”

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Pottinger et al., “Half-Hearted: Trying to Win Afghanistan without Afghan Women.”

<sup>77</sup> Watson, “Female Engagement Teams: The Case for More Civil Affairs Marines.”

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

Medical outreach has been an important part of the FET's mission as it has opened doors and allowed the teams to gain the trust of the locals by providing a visible and needed service;<sup>79</sup> however, in addition, other ways to utilize a FET have been “information operations, military information support to operations, civil-military operations.”<sup>80</sup> FETs in Garmsir in spring/summer 2010, developed sewing programs, assisted with a micro-business to make and sell jewelry, and worked with local clinics and schools to determine needs.<sup>81</sup>

As an enabler that requires specific and sometimes extensive resources from a maneuver unit, the FET carries a lot of pressure on its shoulders to bring something to the unit it supports. In a COIN environment such as southern Afghanistan, where lives are at stake, the FETs have the added burden of justifying their mission to combat-hardened male Marines. Unless a measurable influence is being exerted on the population to sway it to the counterinsurgents' side—or unless the FETs are able to fill a vacuum of information left behind by male Marines unable to access half the population—then it is hard to rationalize the months of training, the resources expended, and the commitment of the FET Marines to this program. Whether the FET program has significantly swayed the population or filled large gaps is difficult to say.

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<sup>79</sup> Pottinger et al., “Half-Hearted: Trying to Win Afghanistan without Afghan Women.”

<sup>80</sup> Watson, “Female Engagement Teams: The Case for More Civil Affairs Marines.”

<sup>81</sup> Author's observation while deployed with USAID in Helmand, Afghanistan in 2009–2011.

## IV. CHALLENGES OF THE CIVIL-MILITARY DIMENSION

### A. CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

Recent COIN, counter-terror, and post-conflict operations in places like Afghanistan and Iraq have once again demonstrated the requirement for even greater symbiosis between the interagency, civilian development actors, and the military. This has expanded the definition of civil-military relations beyond “a domestic debate about the military and the soldier’s relation to the state.”<sup>82</sup> This includes a wide range of activities where civilian and military roles overlap: the military interfaces with local political and tribal leaders, provides security for civilians on the battlefield, with joint civilian-military units on the ground in the form of Provincial Reconstruction Teams, and increased interagency cooperation. There are also increasing instances where military actions like Special Operations raids or drone strikes undertaken as a tactical response have a disproportionate political impact.

Third generation civil-military relations, a term invented by Danish scholar Frederik Rosén, refers to collaboration where there is minimal, if any, distinction between military and civilian tasks.<sup>83</sup> Why this is “third generation” is unclear, however, as Hew Strachan has pointed out that historically in counterinsurgency “the central premise of integrated control—that soldiers were the equals of politicians in practice, even if their subordinates in theory—was easy to sustain.”<sup>84</sup> Strachan argued that historically in colonial small wars and occupation, counterinsurgency increased the political awareness of military organizations and the “fusion” of political and military tasks.<sup>85</sup> Although Frederik Rosen applies this mainly to training of the Afghan security forces by U.S. military personnel, it could—by his definition—also include increased

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<sup>82</sup> Frederik Rosen, “Third Generation Civil-military Relations: Moving Beyond the Security Development Nexus,” *NDU Press Prism* 2, no. 1(n.d.): 29, <http://www.ndu.edu/press/security-development-nexus.html>.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>84</sup> Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army*, 163.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 163–65, 193.

involvement of the military in carrying out functions traditionally handled by civilians (ex. governance and development). This blending of capabilities and resources—civil-military fusion—has its advantages in that it can lend itself to more successful collaboration, while presenting a united front to local populations. Yet, if unsuccessful, it can entail duplication of effort, a waste of assets, and contribute to an overall “blurring” of missions.<sup>86</sup> The Female Engagement Teams are an example of new initiatives which increasingly bring the military into what has traditionally been a civilian function; namely, gender and development work.

## **B. GENERATIONS OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS**

As opposed to the traditional definition of civil-military relations (vis-à-vis civilian control of the military), the new generations of the field expand the focus beyond the domestic realm and into the military’s role in international contexts (usually conflicts). Another aspect which differentiates the first two generations from traditional civil-military relations is that of “a strict separation between military and nonmilitary forms of organization and action.”<sup>87</sup> Of relevance for the purposes of this thesis, third generation civil-military relations in a COIN and nation-building environment differs from the first and second generations in that the line separating what constitutes “civil” and “military” has become almost imperceptible, as in the colonial era of the Arab Bureaux and the Indian Political Service. So, “third generation civil-military relations” is a revival inherent in the post-9/11 rediscovery of small wars by the military.

While the first two generations sparked debate and sometimes tension within the development community (due to issues surrounding the military’s involvement in “humanitarian space”), third generation civil-military relations have not garnered such negative attention. Arguably, the reasons for this indifference could include a lack of awareness by the civilian development sector about the military’s undertakings in governance or development (unlikely), a degree of resignation that civilians simply

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<sup>86</sup>Frederik Rosen, “Third Generation Civil-military Relations: Moving Beyond the Security Development Nexus,” 28-37.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 31.

cannot dissuade the military from veering into the civilian sphere, or an assumption that the military's efforts at development are limited, marginal, and hence inconsequential (and therefore not worth opposing).<sup>88</sup> Finally, a lack of historical awareness of the problems and political consequences that resulted when military tactics in counterinsurgency missions translated into population displacements, collective reprisals, and the assumption by the military of civilian political and administrative functions in places like Malaya, Kenya or Algeria may help to explain an absence of civilian response.

### **C. WINNING “HEARTS AND MINDS,” SIX ADVIL AT A TIME**

While FETs can distribute humanitarian aid, identify projects and even administer minimal medical care, the real question is—should they? Do FETs support the COIN mission? If a program of outreach to indigenous females does have a role to play in COIN and stability operations, are FETs the best vehicle to achieve it? When the military crosses the line from humanitarian intervention (based on immediate need or logistical capability) to development work (i.e., women's empowerment or gender work), who is ensuring that humanitarian principles (e.g., Do No Harm<sup>89</sup>) are followed? Is a program like FET filling a gap that civilian agencies or NGOs have neglected or is it simply providing briefing points to show that the military cares about oppressed women in places where we fight wars?

There are many challenges that a program like FET faces in the field, beginning with concerns that FETs may jeopardize the mission because, in a COIN context, they

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<sup>88</sup> Frederik Rosen, “Third Generation Civil-military Relations: Moving Beyond the Security Development Nexus,” 36–37.

<sup>89</sup> According to UNICEF’s list of Humanitarian Principles, “Do no harm” is summarized as follows: “To minimize possible longer term harm, humanitarian organizations should provide assistance in ways that are supportive of recovery and long-term development.” UNICEF’s Humanitarian Principles, July 2003, [http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCAQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.unicef.org%2Fpathtraining%2FDocuments%2FSession%25204%2520Humanitarian%2520Principles%2FParticipant%2520Manual%2F4.2%2520UNICEF%2520Humanitarian%2520Principles.doc&ei=NxZIUJTWKOYVjALrrYCwCw&usg=AFQjCNG-yqtJ8wBaI9kQdb6JpbF1CFYPrA&sig2=Rb\\_O\\_XpaztJKb7sJSV8NQg](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCAQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.unicef.org%2Fpathtraining%2FDocuments%2FSession%25204%2520Humanitarian%2520Principles%2FParticipant%2520Manual%2F4.2%2520UNICEF%2520Humanitarian%2520Principles.doc&ei=NxZIUJTWKOYVjALrrYCwCw&usg=AFQjCNG-yqtJ8wBaI9kQdb6JpbF1CFYPrA&sig2=Rb_O_XpaztJKb7sJSV8NQg).

may alienate or at the very least offend a “biddable”<sup>90</sup> population by violating customs and traditions. In their piece in the *Small Wars Journal*, a team whose members helped to create and train the first FETs cited several such mission challenges:

- “Die-hard presumptions by battlefield commanders that engaging local women will pay no dividends.
- Hackneyed hypothesis that female engagement will offend most Pashtun men.
- A failure to involve FETs in the planning stage of operations, leading to poorly conceived missions.”<sup>91</sup>

In a civil-military framework, FETs represent an intrusion of the civilian sphere by the military in the tradition of civil-military fusion endemic to counterinsurgency operations but, assuming the military should be involved, this could be better undertaken by an entity such as Civil Affairs.<sup>92</sup> In terms of supporting the mission, an intrusion of private, gendered space may be less shocking to indigenous folk, and more likely successfully to support the mission, if carried out, alternatively, by civilians. Glaringly absent to anyone who has worked in international development is any linkage between the FETs and civilian expertise, funding sources, or local civil society. By not tapping into civilian (whether Coalition or local) resources, the military is doing itself a disservice and possibly impacting negatively other initiatives which might be happening simultaneously on the civilian side. While it is true that in places where the Marines operate in Afghanistan there is a dearth of NGO activity—and even expatriate development workers—it is unclear from most reports and articles about FETs what kind of outreach or due diligence, if any, has been undertaken by FETs on the ground to establish best practices in gender work or involve other stakeholders in their planning and missions.

It is encouraging that some Marines who have been intimately involved with the FET program in Afghanistan do recognize—and have written about—the need for deeper

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<sup>90</sup> Payne, “Some Principles for Influence in Counterinsurgency,” 26.

<sup>91</sup> Pottinger et al., “Half-Hearted: Trying to Win Afghanistan without Afghan Women.”

<sup>92</sup> Watson, “Female Engagement Teams: The Case for More Civil Affairs Marines.”

engagement, longer-term vision, better training, and “unity of effort” with civilian actors.<sup>93</sup> One complaint which civilians often level at the military when it takes on development-type missions is the lack of continuity in military personnel which leads to disjointed and sometimes confused or neglected projects and contacts.<sup>94</sup> Raising expectations which will not be met—the cardinal sin in development work—is of concern with FET engagements. Enquiring about problems and community issues that affect women most directly implies that there is an intention to do something about them. Consequently, a lack of follow through can result in a loss of trust in the military, which extends in the minds of locals unable to distinguish between the military effort and those of multiple agencies and programs involved in stability and development efforts. In this sense, blanket blame can be assigned when requests are not fulfilled—even if no promises were made.<sup>95</sup>

Many of the projects undertaken by the military with its CERP (Commander’s Emergency Response Program) funds are intended to win the “hearts and minds” of the populace in COIN efforts—and the Afghans with whom the military meets are typically very aware of the availability of these funds for small-scale projects. While the FETs can have access to these funds (through their Civil Affairs teams), women’s outreach programs in rural, Pashtun parts of Afghanistan are particularly challenging for several reasons. First, in order to bring resources via projects into a community, there must be buy-in from the men. Projects equal money and money equals power. Since FET engagements generally take place in women’s homes, the choice of the home where meetings take place can be a political issue and can even influence which way funds will be spent. Additionally, it is sometimes difficult to identify projects which can benefit more than one family of women since women are not always allowed to travel freely throughout the village to visit each other’s compounds. This makes it easier for certain women (or men) to co-opt projects (and thereby resources) for their own, or their family’s benefit.

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<sup>93</sup> Watson, “Female Engagement Teams: The Case for More Civil Affairs Marines.”

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

Probably the biggest consideration when undertaking such engagements is the degree to which it could compromise the security of the local women.<sup>96</sup> This can be true for civilian engagements as well, but less likely because the military courts the population in order to gain sympathy and sometimes to gather information. Those who talk to the military most likely will be seen as sympathizers with the enemy (i.e., the Coalition) and therefore put themselves and their families at much greater risk of retaliation from insurgents, their sympathizers, or simply locals who want to keep the military out of the village to maintain a posture of neutrality or non-collaboration. FETs have reported that women have expressed fear of such retaliation due to the presence of the female Marines in their homes.<sup>97</sup>

Other than the potential for putting local women at risk, FET behavior could be considered inappropriate—actions like searching the women in front of men, making promises that are not carried out, and doing unwanted projects. Local skepticism or distrust means that the impact of a FET visit on a “biddable” population is questionable. For example, if part of the draw for women to meet the FETs is the presence of female medical personnel, does handing out a few aspirin to women as they complain of various aches and pains really contribute to improvement of their lives or is it simply a small band-aid meant to lure women into COIN-type interactions? Following one FET engagement in Helmand in 2010, an Afghan man standing nearby approached after the meeting with local women and said, “They hand out these pills that don’t actually do anything. It’s all useless. We know that.”<sup>98</sup> It is safe to assume that many men and women felt this way.

#### **D. FILLING GAPS?**

Historically, the military has traditionally stepped in to take on civilian-type tasks in counterinsurgency environments too violent for civilian presence. PRTs and the like were developed as a sort of half-way house to combine military security with civilian

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<sup>96</sup> Watson, “Female Engagement Teams: The Case for More Civil Affairs Marines.”

<sup>97</sup> Jones, “Woman to Woman in Afghanistan.”

<sup>98</sup> Author’s observation while deployed with USAID in Helmand, Afghanistan in 2009–2011.

expertise. In situations where there is a lack of civilian resources or a combat environment too dangerous for civilians, should the military be taking on civilian tasks? Commentators like Andrew Bacevich would argue that “social engineering” has become as much a part of the military’s competencies as traditional warfare.<sup>99</sup> Others like Hew Strachan see “civil-military fusion” of military and civilian tasks as a first step toward politicization of the military.<sup>100</sup> While all this may be true in a civil-military context, it becomes irrelevant once the COIN mission is undertaken. Since the 1890s, the military has integrated “hearts and minds” economic development operations into small wars/COIN which, after all, assumes that poverty and underdevelopment are a source of discontent exploited by insurgencies. Ergo, ameliorating conditions will win over a popular constituency for the colonialist/counterinsurgent. The question becomes, is the FET a bridge too far or is doing FET in response to the lack of civilian development actors in the field better than doing nothing?<sup>101</sup>

In this author’s view, with the proper training and resources, the FET program could dovetail appropriately with civilian efforts in places where there are gender initiatives and other civilian efforts underway but would most appropriately be undertaken by Civil Affairs, per Watson’s argument. Provincial Reconstructions Teams and District Support Teams—even in the absence of gender specialists or female members—should be able to provide guidance on best practices for working with the local populace in places like rural Afghanistan. Reach-back capability to development expertise would likely increase the FETs’ ability to conduct meaningful engagements with local women but also complement civilian efforts.<sup>102</sup> For example, female civilians could accompany FET missions to assess the possibility for gender work in the area or assist in funding women’s initiatives identified by the FETs.

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<sup>99</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, “The Petraeus Doctrine,” *Atlantic Magazine*, October 2008, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/10/the-petraeus-doctrine/306964/1/>.

<sup>100</sup> Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army*, 163–65.

<sup>101</sup> Pottinger et al., “Half-Hearted: Trying to Win Afghanistan without Afghan Women.”

<sup>102</sup> Watson, “*Female Engagement Teams: The Case for More Civil Affairs Marines.*”

According to USAID's website, "Interaction between the civilian and military sides of the United States Government (USG) has received renewed attention during the US' recent attempts to secure itself against a host of unconventional, non-state military actors."<sup>103</sup> USAID's Civilian–Military Operations Guide (Table 1) clearly states some of the inherent differences in the civilian and military sides of the U.S. government:

<b>USAID</b>	<b>MILITARY</b>
Bottom up, based on analysis	Top down, based on commander's intent
Resource constrained	Not resource constrained
Sustained engagement	Mission oriented
Implemented by partners	Implemented by US and allied military personnel
Locus: in-country	Locus: Combatant Command <sup>104</sup>

Table 1. The challenge of civilian-military coordination (From USAID, 2010)

For the FETs vis-à-vis COIN, the two most relevant aspects from a civil-military relations and a mission effectiveness perspective are the "top down" and "mission oriented" nature of the FET program. An initiative as inherently sensitive and locally specific as women's engagement in rural Afghanistan does not lend itself to directives from above based on a commander's intent (mostly based on security concerns). Nor can it be successful if it does not include continuity in personnel, focus of effort over an extended period, or medium-long term planning to establish and achieve goals that are consistent with development goals. This is not to say that there is no room for military-led programs such as FET that cross the line into development work; however, as "third generation civil-military relations" becomes more and more ubiquitous with the presence of military units in developing countries—and an increased focus on the linkage between

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<sup>103</sup> United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Office of Military Affairs, "Civilian Military Cooperation," [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/global\\_partnerships/ma/background.html](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_partnerships/ma/background.html).

<sup>104</sup> United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Office of Military Affairs, "Civilian-Military Operations Guide," April 27, 2010: 5, [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNADS180.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADS180.pdf).

development/economic prosperity with security (per the 2006 National Security Strategy)—the frontier between military operations and civilian programs will continue to erode.<sup>105</sup>

Third generation civil-military relations—wherein the military as of yore again assumes governance, administrative and development roles usually held by civilian actors—is somewhat more easily measured and monitored when there is an interagency focus in the theater of operations and where the civilian side of the house is comprised of U.S. government civilians, as opposed to only NGOs. For example, in places where there are Provincial Reconstruction Teams, District Support Teams, or other U.S. government civilians, there is typically a mandated coordination aspect to the work between the military and U.S. government civilians. Most of the military’s literature and guidance on stability operations and COIN highly recommends—if not altogether mandating—interagency coordination and collaboration.<sup>106</sup> As third generation civil-military relations evolves, it also becomes clearer to those on the ground that a collaborative approach, when possible, lends itself to a more cohesive, uniform strategy when dealing with both local governments and communities. Resources from both sides can be used to complement existing efforts. For example, the military’s logistical assets—and even access capability—can be of great benefit to civilians trying to operate in an area. Conversely, civilians often bring subject matter expertise, funds, and even local contacts (through their national staff).

This inter-agency relationship can be extremely successful, partly because all U.S. government civilians and U.S. or coalition military will presumably be working with the same overall objectives in mind: advancing U.S. foreign policy goals (granted, sometimes via different measures). On the other hand, when NGOs are present, there is certainly potential for tension. Though reputable and established NGOs will not typically be working at cross-purposes with the military or U.S. government civilians, their methods

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<sup>105</sup> United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Office of Military Affairs, “Civilian Military Cooperation,” [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/global\\_partnerships/ma/background.html](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_partnerships/ma/background.html).

<sup>106</sup> Headquarters Department of the Army, *Stability Operations FM 3-07* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2008): Appendix A-1, <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-07.pdf>.

and objectives can be frustrating for the military (or even other civilians). There are several reasons for this: a desire by NGOs to keep the military out of the “humanitarian space”; unwillingness of NGOs to provide information on their activities/contacts/staff to the military; fear of being perceived as collaborators with the military (or even U.S. government civilians); or, more simply, an unfamiliarity with the military sector and the value added of cooperation and information-sharing. Often, there is such a separation between the military’s efforts in COIN and those of NGOs (conducting development) that each side is not even aware of the other. This might account for the lack of negative attention as mentioned previously. For the military’s part, it does seem to place a premium on coordination and identifying all available resources in an area of operations. In this way, the military is more forward-thinking and progressive than many NGOs who shun any collaboration. The military—especially the Marines—seem to be keen to “think outside the box” when it comes to developing means to access the population, build confidence, and make contacts for purposes of COIN. This does not always seem to be the case with the NGOs. The downside may be that “thinking outside the box” sometimes takes the military into uncharted territory where enthusiasm exceeds expertise and crosses the civil-military divide. FETs appear to be a case in point.

## V. CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the genesis of the USMC Female Engagement Team (FET) concept. While an ad hoc experiment that grew out of the Lioness Program in Iraq and transferred to Afghanistan, FETs boast an impeccable COIN pedigree. FETs operate on the premise that the population is “biddable”<sup>107</sup> and can be persuaded to support the incumbent power, and hence isolate the insurgency, through good governance and social programs that improve their lives. The notion that women form an important constituency for this outreach can be traced to the writings of David Galula, who stressed the importance of female engagement and attributed France’s failure to win the War of Algerian Independence (1954–1962) in part to a lack of female outreach.<sup>108</sup>

While programs like FET continue to refine their mission and methods, the Marine Corps should be given credit for asking the tough questions, trying to fill in where the civilians have left a gap, and for being willing to re-assess its impact and intent. It is still too early to know if the FET program will have had lasting impact on the women of Afghanistan, much less on the outcome of the mission. However, given the improvised, ad hoc nature of the program and its limited application, as it now stands, this appears unlikely. If the USMC plans to develop and implement the FET program elsewhere as a means in the traditions of David Galula of outreach to women, it needs to refine its purpose, the assets that need to be devoted to it, and how training can be refined: this will necessarily entail a greater role for Civil Affairs within FETs.<sup>109</sup> If the lines between civilian and military practitioners are increasingly muddled on the counterinsurgency battlefield, then a clearer definition of roles and missions of force multipliers will mean that civilians, both governmental and non-governmental, and the military should have learned in Iraq and Afghanistan that the interagency effort is here to stay and that both the military and civilian sides have something to bring to the table.

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<sup>107</sup> Payne, “Some Principles for Influence in Counterinsurgency,” 26.

<sup>108</sup> Galula, *Pacification in Algeria*, vi.

<sup>109</sup> Watson, “Female Engagement Teams: The Case for More Civil Affairs Marines.”

One of the central tensions of civil-military relations in interagency COIN is that between economic development/social outreach and intelligence gathering for tactical purposes. When not clear—or not articulated properly to the public (local or international)—this can compromise the integrity of a program, and thereby its overall impact and perceived intent. It can also put civilian participants at risk if engagements are not transparent or at least seen as harmless to the area males (or enemy). Female Engagement Teams, like other enablers such as Civil Affairs and PRTs, may provide useful information to intelligence professionals who can then further disseminate information, thereby improving all actors' ability to carry out effective and informed missions; however, these enablers should not be confused with actual intelligence collectors.<sup>110</sup>

After the FETs refine their mission they need to be properly trained and resourced. In order to bridge the existing gaps, the military should incorporate more civilian expertise into both its pre-deployment training and on-the-ground force (through more extensive embeds of civilian advisors with units) and civilians should also make more of an effort to understand the military culture, the logic and limitations of COIN, and the role of the non-lethal assets the military brings to the fight. While some strides have been made in recent years with regard to this—via training and simulation/role-play exercises—there is still room for improvement and each new theater of operations will present its own challenges.

As Julia Watson emphasizes, “Civil Affairs teams specialize in assessing and working with the civil dimension.”<sup>111</sup> Female Civil Affairs Marines in both Iraq and Afghanistan have had success both in accessing local women and discerning the real reasons for their discontent. These are skills that Civil Affairs Marines are trained to do,

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<sup>110</sup> Michael T. Flynn, Matt Pottinger, and Paul D. Batchelor, “Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan,” *Center for New American Security* (January 2010): 4, [http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/AfghanIntel\\_Flynn\\_Jan2010\\_code507\\_voices.pdf](http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/AfghanIntel_Flynn_Jan2010_code507_voices.pdf).

<sup>111</sup> Watson, “Female Engagement Teams: The Case for More Civil Affairs Marines.”

at which they excel, and which can be combined with all phases of combat operations: having FETs within Civil Affairs would be a more efficient and effective use of female Marines for these missions.<sup>112</sup>

Traditional civil-military relations have taken on new sub-fields in the past few years, due to the changing landscape of international development, and military operations in general. As the field of international development has increasingly been faced with non-traditional actors (i.e., the military) conducting projects and programs for purposes of COIN, the civilian sector (both governmental and non-governmental) has had to re-adjust its thinking as to what extent it is willing to co-exist and collaborate with the military. This started with peacekeeping operations in the 1990s, but has grown more and more complex with theaters like Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>113</sup> The FET program initiated by the Marines is a good example of the increasingly indistinguishable boundaries between military and civilian roles and responsibilities. Civilians, and indeed many traditional military and security and defense commentators, will continue to question the military for undertaking development and governance work as a task that distracts from the mission, compromises traditional military skills, and potentially politicizes the military. The military will criticize civilians for failure to send sufficient personnel to the field or for not providing adequate funding or resources for development. Iraq and Afghanistan at least have highlighted the nature of the problem. What is required, if the U.S. military continues to operate in a COIN framework that considers female engagement an important component, is more strategic focus on these problems so that the FETs are no longer a last minute, field-expedient addendum. Instead, the benefits and limitations of FETS should be debated. This is the only way FETs may become part of an integrated counterinsurgency civil-engagement strategy, with a coherent, properly focused mission and the training and resources to achieve mission goals.

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<sup>112</sup> Watson, “Female Engagement Teams: The Case for More Civil Affairs Marines.”

<sup>113</sup> Rosen, “Third Generation Civil-military Relations: Moving Beyond the Security Development Nexus,” 30.

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